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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 23rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PIBULSONGGRAM (Thailand)

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AGENDA ITEM 72: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 72: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/46/13 and Add.1, A/46/373, 399, 535-541, 622; A/SPC/46/L.12, L.15-L.22)

1. Mr. ELIASSON (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the five Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, said that, despite the increasing demands on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Agency had been coping with its work in an impressive way. However, only a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts could solve the problem of the Palestine refugees. The Nordic countries commended recent efforts, especially by the United States, to bring together all the parties to the conflict. The Middle East peace conference in Madrid had been a major breakthrough, and the positive atmosphere surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian talks was particularly gratifying. The Nordic countries appealed to all parties concerned to show flexibility and far-sightedness and to refrain from any acts that might constitute an obstacle to the peace process.

2. The Nordic countries commended the Lebanese Government's ongoing efforts to extend its authority in Lebanon in accordance with the Taif Agreement. It was to be hoped that that would lead to improved conditions for the Palestinians.

3. The intifadah and the Israeli countermeasures had had a heavy impact on UNRWA's working environment over the past four years. The Nordic countries continued to be preoccupied by the loss of life in intifadah-related incidents and intra-Palestinian confrontations and by such measures as administrative detention and the demolition of houses in the West Bank and Gaza, and they urged Israel to comply fully with the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949 and to freeze all settlement activities in the occupied territories. His delegation deplored the incursions on UNRWA premises and the detention of UNRWA staff members.

4. The Nordic countries were encouraged by the cost-effective way that education was being carried out in the UNRWA schools despite the difficult circumstances and shared the concern expressed in the Commissioner-General's report (A/46/13) at the considerable study time lost in the occupied territories owing to curfews and strikes. It was difficult to understand how the closure of schools could have any significant impact on the security situation.

5. UNRWA was to be commended for its efforts to upgrade emergency medical care in the West Bank and Gaza and to improve the health situation in the camps. Assuring minimum standards of nutrition, shelter and clothing were of fundamental importance in dealing with acute shortcomings, but in the long

(Mr. Eliasson, Sweden)

term, it was essential to raise the socio-economic level of the refugee population as a whole. For that reason, the Nordic countries were pleased that UNRWA was increasingly engaged in income-generating programmes.

6. The efforts of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations were of great value to the work of UNRWA, and the Nordic countries called for expanded inter-agency cooperation with a view to optimizing resources.

7. The Agency's financial situation was relatively healthy, but UNRWA's resource base must be improved to keep pace with the rapid growth of the refugee population. The Nordic countries were pleased that a broadening of the Agency's donor base was considered to be of high priority. Special efforts should be directed towards persuading the countries of the region to restore their traditional share of the contributions. Giving greater attention to longer-range strategic planning might help to consolidate a sound financial situation.

8. In 1991, contributions from the Nordic countries had amounted to almost one fourth of the total contributions from individual countries to UNRWA's General Fund and ongoing activities. The Nordic countries also supported UNRWA's emergency and special operations. The international community must not fail to back the Agency's vital work at a crucial juncture in the history of the Middle East.

9. Mr. EL-ARABI (Egypt) said that, although UNRWA had been established temporarily in 1949, the need for the Agency had grown constantly owing to the deterioration of the conditions of the Palestinian people under the Israeli occupation. The Agency had broadened its scope to include refugees outside the camps established in 1948 and had extended its activities beyond those it had originally been entrusted with. As a result of the 1967 occupation and Israeli measures, which had included the wounding and killing of defenceless civilians, tension had increased. The report of the Commissioner-General detailed numerous human rights violations, the imposition of collective sanctions and economic pressure in the form of the razing of houses, the confiscation of land, the uprooting of trees and the arbitrary distribution of water to Palestinians and Israeli settlers. The vicious circle of violence and bitterness should be halted. He welcomed the Agency's plan to expand the scope of income-generating projects and to invest in small and medium enterprises and training schemes to create employment. Disruption of the school year and the detention of pupils had caused a sharp deterioration in education in the occupied territories. The introduction of a system of travel passes for East Jerusalem had effectively divided the occupied territories into four separate areas, impeding movement between the northern and southern parts of the West Bank and constituting a further grave violation of international agreements on occupied territories.

10. His delegation appreciated the efforts of the Commissioner-General for administrative and financial reform of the Agency and the move to a biennial

(Mr. El-Arabi, Egypt)

budgetary cycle as at 1992-1993, which would facilitate monitoring and collaboration with other United Nations agencies. He noted with satisfaction the healthy state of the Agency's financial condition, but feared that the sharp increase in the population of the occupied territories would prevent the Agency from carrying out its activities at the current level if donations to the budget did not also increase. The report noted the need for some deep thinking about the political and philosophical concepts underlying UNRWA activities. He suggested that the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA should also address the question of funding for the Agency. He hoped that the Commissioner-General would be requested in future to broaden the scope of the UNRWA annual report from financial matters and services to include other questions addressed by General Assembly resolutions regarding the problems of Palestine refugees. With reference to General Assembly resolution 45/73 E on the situation of Palestine refugees in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, he suggested the establishment of a committee to examine the question of issuing identification cards for Palestine refugees and their families, irrespective of whether or not they were recipients of services of the Agency. Finally, he was confident that the international community would not allow the conditions under which the Palestinian people was living to persist and that UNRWA would continue to alleviate their suffering, meet their needs and develop their economic potential on the basis of increased collaboration and coordination with other humanitarian and development organizations. He urged the international community to increase its support for UNRWA. He called upon Israel to cooperate with UNRWA, to respect its legal status, to ensure the protection of its various offices and the security and freedom of movement of its officials, not to obstruct its regular or emergency activities and to release the UNRWA officials whom it had detained. The first step of the peace process had recently been taken at Madrid. He looked forward to a time when there would no longer be a need for UNRWA.

11. Mr. MAHMOOD (Pakistan) said that the deteriorating situation of the Palestine refugees over the past several years, particularly in the occupied territories, had greatly increased the burden on the Agency. The events of the past year had posed fresh challenges, and UNRWA's activities in the areas of health, education and relief and social services as well as emergency aid had become more indispensable than ever.

12. Pakistan noted with deep concern that the Israeli authorities had continued their harsh measures as the intifadah had entered into its fourth year. UNRWA was facing persistent difficulties in the occupied territories because of Israeli interference, and a number of UNRWA staff members had been arrested and detained, in clear violation of the Agency's immunities and privileges.

13. His delegation was pleased that UNRWA operations had benefited from recent positive developments in Lebanon. It was to be hoped that the situation of the Palestine refugees would improve once the Lebanese Government restored normal conditions in southern Lebanon.

(Mr. Mahmood, Pakistan)

14. Although the financial situation of UNRWA in the year 1991 had been relatively sound, Pakistan was concerned about the overall insufficiency of financial resources, particularly at a time when the Agency must expand its emergency assistance and income-generation programmes. In that context, he announced that Pakistan had contributed 340,000 rupees in the previous year and would continue to do so in the future.

15. His delegation supported the proposal by the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA concerning the holding of an international information day on UNRWA. Such a step would help create a greater awareness for the Agency and its activities, with the ultimate objective of generating additional financial resources.

16. Pakistan welcomed the Middle East peace conference held recently in Madrid. It was to be hoped that the peace process would lead to a just and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East and enable the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-determination. Until such time, however, UNRWA must continue its vital work, and his delegation therefore urged the international community to provide additional support and increased financial assistance.

17. Mr. YU Shuning (China) said that, despite the Agency's enormous efforts, there had been no fundamental change in the situation of the Palestine refugees in the occupied territories, whose legitimate rights continued to be ignored. During the period covered by the report of the Commissioner-General (A/46/13), curfews had been imposed, houses sealed off and schools closed, many Palestine refugees killed or wounded by the occupying authorities, and the immunities and privileges of UNRWA had been violated. China urged the Government of Israel to honour its obligations under the fourth Geneva Convention and the Charter of the United Nations.

18. The only way to end the plight of the Palestine refugees was through a just and reasonable political settlement. Failure would not only bring tremendous suffering to the Palestinian people but also pose a threat to peace in the Middle East and the world as a whole. Any settlement must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The occupied Arab territories must be returned, the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people restored and the sovereignty and security of all countries in the region, including Israel, respected and guaranteed. To obtain those objectives, China had always been in favour of convening an international conference on the Middle East under the auspices of the United Nations. It was to be hoped that the negotiation process begun in Madrid would yield positive results so as to promote a comprehensive, just and reasonable settlement. Genuine and lasting peace was only possible if the State of Palestine and the State of Israel recognized each other and the Arab and Jewish peoples lived with each other in harmony. China would continue its efforts to reach that goal.

19. Mr. REDZUAN (Malaysia) said that his Government sympathized with the plight of the Palestinians, who were suffering as refugees in their own homeland. The responsibility lay with the State of Israel. The Palestinian problem would persist until Israel recognized the inalienable right of the Palestinians to a homeland.

20. The situation in the occupied territories continued to be appalling. Malaysia was gravely concerned that the Israeli authorities continued to demolish houses and to arrest and detain Palestinians without charges or trial. It was also alarmed at the heavy toll of Palestinians killed or wounded as a result of the brutal use of force and at other repressive measures of the Israeli authorities in clear violation of the fourth Geneva Convention. Malaysia called upon Israel to desist from the removal and resettlement of Palestine refugees, the destruction of their homes and the construction of illegal Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories, actions which were counter-productive to current peace efforts. The Security Council had an obligation to ensure Israel's compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

21. Malaysia deplored Israeli interference in the Agency's humanitarian work and operations in disregard of UNRWA's privileges and immunities. Israel was liable under international law for any loss, damage or injury arising from its policies and practices in the occupied territories.

22. The denial of education to young Palestinians through the prolonged closure of schools and frequent curfews were violations of basic human rights. The Israeli authorities must facilitate UNRWA's efforts to provide education to young Palestinians.

23. Malaysia was concerned about the Agency's funding prospects, in particular the shortfall for the emergency-related programmes in Lebanon and the occupied territories. A discontinuation or reduction of those programmes would have disturbing humanitarian and political consequences. Malaysia would maintain its modest but regular contribution to UNWRA, and it urged those Member States that had not yet done so to contribute to the Agency and those Member States with the financial capability to increase their contributions. His Government welcomed the significant change that would be made to UNRWA's budgetary procedures with effect from 1992-1993 in order to reduce the workload and ensure more efficient use of the resources.

24. Malaysia commended the efforts of the United States and the Soviet Union in convening the Middle East peace conference in Madrid, which, it was to be hoped, had set in motion a negotiation process that would bring about a durable peace in the region and settle the question of a homeland for the Palestinians.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.